# CHARLES·LAMB

THE PILGRIM BOOKS

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# CHARLES LAMB

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CHARLES LAMB

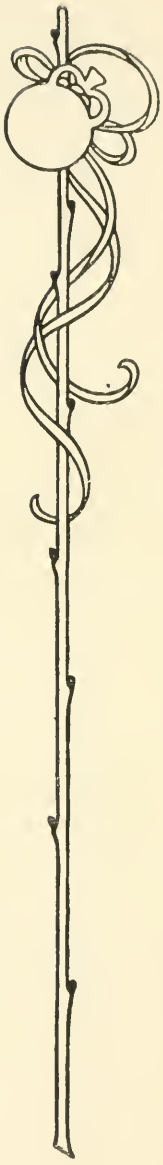
From the Water-Colour by G. F. Joseph in the British Museum

# CHARLES LAMB

## HIS HOMES AND HAUNTS

BY

S. L. BENSUSAN



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# PREFACE

In preparing this simple story of the life and work of Charles Lamb, I have relied upon the best of the biographies and criticisms that have been issued since his death, and have not hesitated to refer to opinions, recollections, and records published during his life. Among the authors consulted are Edward Moxon, who married Elia's adopted daughter, Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd, Percy Fitzgerald, Canon Ainger, the Right Hon. Augustine Birrell, R. D. Gillman, and E. V. Lucas. I have paid several visits to Elia's country: to Buntingford, where he held his first and only freehold; to Widford, where Mrs. Field is buried; to Blakesware and Edmonton. For some years I lived on the top floor of Mitre Court Buildings, from which Lamb could see "the white sails glide by the bottom of the King's Bench Walks," and in Harcourt Buildings by the side of Crown Office Row in the Temple, where he was born. I have often tried to follow his road to the East India House, to Dalston, Islington, Enfield, Edmonton, and the other haunts he loved or favoured. If this brief and simple record of one of the most lovable of men and writers can add a few names to the ever lengthening list of his admirers, a very real debt will have been partly paid.

S. L. B.

# CHARLES LAMB

Great men of letters in these islands have very often attracted by their genius later generations than their own, while they repelled their contemporaries by reason of an aggressive or unsympathetic personality. We love John Bunyan, but few would care to live with the same type of man to-day, though the author of "Pilgrim's Progress" was of highest virtue; his austerity of life would have made our latter-day existence seem full of folly and excess. The bitter humour of Swift must have limited his personal appeal. Byron, Shelley, Christopher Marlowe, and John Milton, to name some poets of varying eras and diverse temperaments, would not have made many friends in any ordinary middle-class company; the vices of some and the virtue of the other would have made the average man intolerant or uneasy. Even Shakespeare himself, who would seem to have been as many-sided in social life as in genius, had no home life worth mentioning, and would seek the law courts as lightly as he would seek the playhouse. But that it were unkind, examples might be given of great writers who flourished half a century ago, achieved recognition among all educated English-speaking people, and in private life were ill-tempered,

over-bearing, uncertain, and quarrelsome. It is not impossible for the finest thoughts or most facile expression to be associated with want of self-restraint and courtesy to others. To find the men of letters, who, without weakness or lack of moral fibre and strong opinion, were gentle, unassuming, and self-sacrificing, whose exquisite work is the reflection of a really delightful mind, who make friends while they live, and add largely to the circle when they have passed beyond the reach of friendship, it is necessary very closely to examine the records, to choose with nicest care and discrimination. Tradition and flattering biography will not suffice. There is a biographer, very much in evidence, against whose methods a leading man of letters protested quite recently, who is entirely unable to distinguish between a man and his work, who believes with a perfect faith in the impossibility of noble utterances being associated with an unlovely life, who looks to gather the largest audiences with the bait of unstinted and undiscriminating eulogy. Unfortunately, this biographer, a modern Briareus, is in evidence everywhere.

A few authors and poets have stood the test of unbiassed criticism, and there are men whom we must needs love had their work been even of less importance than it is, their faults or weakness more prominent. When we turn to make a list of writers, there is one name that five out of six would put at the head of their paper. It is the name of the youngest son of a poor scrivener and barrister's servant. He was born on

February 10th, 1775, at No. 2 Crown Office Row in the Temple; the gaunt, unlovely buildings that in a newer form still overlook Inner Temple Gardens, saw his birth; he was baptized one month later, to be known by all who love literature as Charles Lamb. Nearly sixty years later he had travelled from Crown Office Row to Edmonton Churchyard, a child at heart though an ageing man in years, dying just so far as it is possible for one to die who has lived in the heart of all the lovers of letters since then and has a sure place in the affection of generations yet unborn.

I turn to my bookshelves and find in a corner devoted to his works one volume published many years ago and bought for eighteen pence at the shop of a second-hand bookseller, such a shop as Lamb himself loved to frequent. It introduced me to Elia, and contains all his works in small but clear type, essays, sketches, tales, poetry, dramatic pieces, translations, miscellaneous work, nearly everything but letters—surely the best bargain that ever fell to a schoolboy lover of books, though the published price, seven shillings and sixpence, was cheap enough in all conscience for a volume whose beauties are unfailing as the stores of the widow of Zarephath. It stands before me as I write, an old friend to whose pages I have never turned in vain.

The homes and haunts of Charles Lamb, all easily traced, were in and around his beloved London—Middlesex, Hertfordshire, and Essex were the counties he knew best. From the banks of the Thames to

Blakesware in Hertfordshire, we may mark the northern and southern limit of his regular excursions; from Potter's Bar on the west to Epping Forest on the east, we may fix the remaining points. Stray journeys made in holiday time beyond these boundaries may almost be ignored, though they include visits to the Lake Country, which was less to Elia than the Strand and Fleet Street, for he says he could live his life in familiar London, but never among lakes and hills. Strange cities and lands remote were not for him—his visit to Paris in 1822 left him with no lasting impression. The honours that came his way were few and far between, the troubles that beset him grave and serious, but he passed brave and smiling through life; sorrow could not dull his sense of humour nor blunt the keen edge of his kindness. Writing of him in the latter days, Cowden Clarke tells us "he had a smile of singular sweetness and beauty." We love him perhaps best for the odd mingling of strength and weakness: the strength that enabled him, with few advantages, to play a man's part through life, to sacrifice himself for others, to turn a brave face to all misfortune, and the weakness—if it be weakness, certainly it was of the noblest sort—that kept him from condemning others, that made him tolerant of shortcomings, prompt to forgive and ready to condone. Had he been an austere moralist who looked askance at the bottle, and had he succeeded in winning the long drawn battle with his beloved pipe, we had loved him less even though we had admired him more. His lines were cast among the most brilliant men of letters of

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

From the Portrait by Northcote

his generation, and it would be hard to find one among them, save only Thomas Carlyle, who did not hold him in highest esteem.

There was something in Carlyle and Lamb that made them impossible to each other. Carlyle has set his impression down brutally and with slander. Lamb knew the Carlyle type; before the memorable interview he had written, "I have been trying all my life to like Scotchmen, and am obliged to desist from the experiment in despair." Even those he cared for least—Shelley, for example—did not disguise their appreciation of his qualities. At a time of life when the approach of middle age found him without a literary success to his credit, he was a well-loved man.

There was much to attract generous sympathy towards his life—the sudden tragedy of his mother's death, his unfailing sympathy with his sister, the complete companionship between the two that nothing was allowed to sever. Surely there is little more pathetic in the lives of the two than their journeys to the asylum when Mary Lamb felt an attack threatening, the dreary prospect made brighter by faith and hope, the grim reality enforced by the strait jacket they carried with them. Lamb's early passion for Alice W——, supposed to have been Ann Simmons of Blenheim, near Blakesware in Hertfordshire, was known to many. It was left to the late John Hollingshead, whose great-aunt was Mary Lamb's nurse, to tell the world that in July 1819 Elia proposed by letter to Fanny Kelly, the actress, and was refused on the follow-

ing day. The incident brings us very close to our author, for Miss Kelly lived long and died unmarried in the early eighties of last century; and we must feel it a pleasant privilege to have lived, if not in the same years as Lamb, in those of the woman whom, after Mary Lamb, he loved best in the world. Perhaps had the truth been known to some of his brilliant contemporaries, they would have admired him still more than they did, if that be possible. But Charles Lamb asked for nobody's pity; he did not wear his heart upon his sleeve; it was he who had pity to spare for all mankind, who seemed to see in the weakness and foibles of others the battle they were waging against their own infirmities.

Perhaps we love him best because he was such a devout lover of life. Hear him in "New Year's Eve": "I am in love with this green earth, the face of town and country, the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. I would set up my tabernacle here. I am content to stand still at the age to which I am arrived; I, and my friends: to be no younger, no richer, no handsomer." His life was a constant tribute to the truth of his creed. Happy in his friends' success, happy in his unfortunate sister's companionship, happy in the possession of his well-beloved folios, sufficiently content for a time in the wide spaces of rural England, and happier still in the narrow streets of the London he knew best, Lamb contrived to radiate happiness round him. All the shining lights of literature of his time were attracted in turn to his orbit, and even if

they were hard to please at times—and it would have been at least as easy to quarrel with them as they found it to quarrel with one another—there was nearly always harmony at the Wednesday night gatherings in Lamb's rooms in the old Temple days when he was still working in the East India House, and he was ever a welcome guest when he turned from his home for consolation in those frequent dark hours when his sister's malady overcame her.

Lamb had no outside aid to popularity. His appearance was uncouth, his splendid head stood upon an attenuated body that always seemed as ill nourished as it was poorly clad, he stammered in his speech. There were times when he drank more than was good for him, he achieved no success until two-thirds of his life had been spent, he was comparatively poor. But all these drawbacks to success were of no avail to counteract the beauty of a personality that stands well-nigh alone in literature. He was a magnet to the literary men of his time; some he attracted without wishing to do so, some he tolerated rather than liked because their attachment to him was so apparent. Coleridge died with his last words given to Charles and Mary Lamb, Wordsworth wrote in his threnody, "Oh, he was good, if e'er a good man lived."

London has changed very considerably since the days when Charles and Mary Lamb could find a rural retreat in Dalston, Enfield Chase, or Edmonton, and write of fields and lanes in districts now among the most crowded of Greater London, but it has not

changed sufficiently in the part they knew best to keep us from following their footsteps with some degree of certainty. In the country, change has moved more slowly still, and the lover of Elia can trace him to Blakesware, Cherry Green, and Mackery End, to Cambridge and many other places in which he passed his well-earned, harmless hours of leisure. The kindliness of the man is best seen when we look through his work from the days when it was trivial, laboured, and uninspired, down to the times when it acquired—with seeming suddenness—the elements of immortality. Throughout the record it is hard to find anything unkind, save in a sonnet directed against Gifford, the editor of the *Quarterly*, "so savage and tartarly." Professor Wilson ("Christopher North"), who had handled "Elia" very severely in the pages of *Blackwood*, came to know and honour him in the latter years. Lamb's outbursts against the Regent were the expression of very genuine feeling; the poor jests retailed at sixpence each to the *Morning Post* were written for a living. There is nothing else to which exception may be taken. In an age of hard hitting, Lamb was as gentle as his name. He said that it was hard for him to hate any man, and that when he had met his enemy he could hate him no longer.

It is a pleasant task to follow such a man through the town and the countryside, to record the number of his friends, the story of his failure and success, the history of as lovable a life as ever gave itself to literature in the interval of many and varying duties

CHARLES AND MARY LAMB

Painted in 1834 by F. S. Cary

conscientiously performed. We are enabled, through the medium of the essays, to share his simple pleasures with him; his troubles he keeps to himself. The death of his parents and brother, the illness of his sister, the rejection of his suit by Miss Kelly, the trouble in early days of establishing a balance between income and expenditure, the emptiness of labours on which his heart was never set, the sense of solitude that must have oppressed him so often—of all these things he has little to tell by way of complaint. He was like one of those sundials we meet in old-time gardens with the charming motto—"Horas non numero nisi felices," or, still more applicable to the gentle essayist, "Docet umbra." Lamb loved sundials, and has recorded his affection for them.

He was so courageous in misfortune that we do not readily realise how success could please him. He writes to Dorothy Wordsworth *à propos* of his "New Year's Eve," from which quotation has been made above: "How I like to be liked, and what I do to be liked!" It is the utterance of a child rather than a man of forty-five, but this strange combination of man's strength and child's simplicity keeps Lamb's memory as fresh as the sea. The revelation of a simple nature, enriched by so many virtues and yet humanised by a few weaknesses, makes all men and women his debtors. We admire the writings of Hazlitt, Charles Lamb's contemporary and friend, we find in his essays a certain quality to which Lamb neither attained nor aspired; others of Lamb's circle—Words-

worth, Coleridge, De Quincey—have given us enchanted hours, but none has the same hold upon our affection; and if the works of the four were set side by side and we had but one choice, Wordsworth's fitful genius might hardly avail to turn the scale against Lamb's humanity; Coleridge and De Quincey would have a poor chance of preference. In fact, had it not been for Carlyle, we should not have believed that there was among Lamb's contemporaries one who could actively dislike, despise, and misrepresent him, for he was loved by men of great and unacknowledged talent, whom ill-health and irregular life had rendered very hard to please, and Lamb was the last man in the world to make a deliberate effort to gain the praise of others, even though he loved it when won. He lived his own life, thought for himself, never sacrificed a principle, paid court to nobody. If he felt that he was expected to produce a good impression upon strangers, he would deliberately baffle them; they would come prepared to hear wisdom and wit, and he would belabour their intelligence with foolish puns with which he delighted to overlay a genuine wit. Herein lay an attractive, whimsical side to his nature—he could not and would not pose; failure could not sour nor applause weaken a temperament that finds no parallel in the history of our literature.

He had his fondness for good things; presents of game and fish were tributes that were ever welcome; a sucking pig could rouse him to ecstasy. Writing to Coleridge in 1822 in reply to a message of thanks

for a pig he was thought to have sent to the poet, he says—"To confess an honest truth, a pig is one of those things I could never think of sending away. . . . Where the fine feeling of benevolence giveth a higher smack than the sensual rarity, my friends or any good man may command me; but pigs are pigs, and I myself therein am nearest to myself. Nay, I should think it an affront, and undervaluing done to Nature who bestowed such a boon upon us, if in churlish mood I parted with the precious gift." In due course came the essay on roast pig. Only in later life did the appeal of the unclean beast fail in its hold upon him, and then he gave his highest appreciation to hare. In his own words, he had not "carried up into mature life the prepossessions of childhood. . . . The hare has many friends, but none more sincere than Elia."

The essays are perhaps the most exquisite studies in egotism that our bookshelves hold. All the rare thoughts and gentle fancies that might have travelled no farther than one beloved confidant had the early romance of his life matured, or Miss Kelly's devotion to an unknown lover been less complete, were entrusted to paper, to the infinite delight of an ever-widening circle of readers. Lamb's early work has been highly praised. Shelley was delighted with "Rosamund Gray," and called it "a lovely thing" in a letter to Leigh Hunt. Swinburne said that if a lover of the essayist should enter the lists against any of his detractors, he would doubtless find himself driven or tempted to break all bounds of critical reason in his panegyric of

a genius so beloved. Question or denial of Lamb's dramatic powers might goad him on to maintain that "John Woodvil" is the only tragedy in the language worthy to be set beside "Hamlet," and "The Wife's Trial" the one comedy which may hold its own if compared with "Much Ado about Nothing." And that fine critic and supreme poet goes on to utter the crowning truth when he writes, "No labour could be at once so delightful and so useless, so attractive and so vain, as the task of writing in praise of Lamb." Here indeed is noble praise from him who said he failed to understand what could attract men to criticism unless it was the noble pleasure of praising.

Much as we may love Elia's gifts, we must admit that the disposition which prompted their expression was the greatest gift of all. To some, indeed to most, such a life as his might have been no more than a vain quest through a wilderness — for him the desert blossomed like a rose. There was that within him which defied ill-fortune, which looked for beauty everywhere, and never in vain. He was not quite like the Persian philosopher-poet who could write, "A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou, beside me singing in the wilderness, and wilderness were Paradise enow." We know that Lamb was on one occasion only sustained through a "Mozartian storm" with the assistance of a "foaming mug" of beer. He would have wanted a pipe, a glass, some roast pig—in later years, roast hare —a few friends, and then the desert would perhaps have yielded material for an essay; it would at least

ENTRANCE TO THE OLD SCHOOL IN NEWGATE STREET

have consoled him and his friends for their presence there. When he had gone from the scene of his social life, and the busy thoroughfare through which in the days of his work he had passed to and fro with the utmost regularity, knew him no more, there was something akin to a wilderness for those he had left behind; withdrawn from his intimate circle, the last years passed wearily for him too. Men of every shade of opinion united to mourn his loss, though there is no reason to believe that they realised the measure of posthumous fame which was to be his. Had Edward Moxon done so, surely he would never have sold Elia's library to America. Lamb's unassuming nature, his simple life, his bland and child-like character, were singularly effective as a disguise for genius. The scenes of his mild exploits, the subjects of his limpid prose, did not seem to hold the interest or the strength that could bear transmission down the years. Correspondence has been kept by some of those with whom Lamb exchanged letters, but it is probable that nobody would have been more startled than Lamb to learn that his letters dealing with the most trifling incidents of the moment, would have an interest for literary men and the reading public a century after they were penned. He wrote with the generosity of the prodigal, we preserve his letters with the scrupulous care of the miser; he who has an unpublished letter, a few fragments of essay or poem, commands attention and envy. We gather to ourselves the fragrance of a life that appeals surely to well-nigh every type of mind. We love to read Lamb,

to talk Lamb, to think Lamb. He binds diverse temperaments to-day as he did nearly a century ago, and yet he would surely have been well-nigh as surprised as pleased to learn how deeply he is loved by his countrymen. When we turn to Elia and consider his life and work in the light of our love for both, the pathetic figure of "Bridget Elia," his ill-fated sister Mary, comes before us. Brother and sister were united through life, not only in their many places of pilgrimage, but in the churchyard at Edmonton when the journey was over. It is to Mary Lamb we must look for not a little of the inspiration of the essays. We read that when her bad attacks were passing from her, Mary Lamb's mind harked back to scenes of her childhood, which she could recall with marvellous accuracy. In the last year of his life Lamb told the story. "Her memory is unnaturally strong; and from ages past, if we may so call the earliest records of our poor life, she fetches thousands of names and things that never would have dawned upon me again, and thousands from the ten years she lived before me. What took place from early girlhood to her coming of age principally lives again—every important thing and every trifle—in her brain with the vividness of real presence. For twelve hours incessantly she will pour out without intermission all her past life, forgetting nothing, pouring out name after name . . . as a dream; sense and nonsense, truths and errors huddled together, a medley between inspiration and possession."

Doubtless these rambling utterances were the

common aftermath of all her seizures, and kept her brother's memory refreshed when he turned to write of old times and incidents that might else have been buried in oblivion.

All writers owe much to their environment, and Charles Lamb's stands alone in literature, so that when we turn to or from his pages with a sense of gratitude which must ever fail to find adequate expression, we are obliged in fairness to pay our little tribute to the stricken sister whose "rambling chat" was better to Elia "than the sense and sanity of this world." We may imagine we see her still, as Charles left her, a feeble old woman in her seventieth year, walking from Walden Cottage to Edmonton Churchyard, where her beloved companion lay at rest—wandering disconsolate into the street to accost strangers and ask if they had seen him, or sitting dreamily among his well-loved folios at home, waiting, not perhaps unhappily, for the long years of separation to come to an end.

# LAMB'S LIFE AND HAUNTS

## I. EARLY DAYS

On February 10th, in the year 1775, Charles Lamb first saw such light as entered 2 Crown Office Row, the block of buildings which, though since rebuilt, still occupies its original position, looking out over the Inner Temple Gardens, where of old times the great protagonists of the Wars of the Roses are said to have plucked their respective emblems, and where, in these years of grace and progress, we have an annual flower show. In the long, hot summer evenings, when the dust gathers thickly in the streets beyond, the poor children of the neighbouring parishes are permitted by the benchers of the Inner Temple to play there to their hearts' content. As soon as the last busy barrister may be presumed to have finished his final consultation with the solicitors, and to have left his chambers for the day, the gardens are given over to harmless merry-making. Times change, and fashions follow in their wake, but in the twentieth century as in the eighteenth, the Temple spares a part of its imperfect accommodation for people who are not members of the Inns. Men of the other professions—

OLD DRURY LANE THEATRE AT THE TIME OF LAMB'S PLAY—ANTECEDENT TO THE FIRE OF 1809

From an Old Print

bachelors for the most part, and not too well blessed with the world's goods—rent chambers on the upper floors and live unacknowledged lives that may be terminated as far as the Inn is concerned at a three months' notice.

Sub-tenants of some barrister who practises no longer and is content to derive a small profit from sub-letting rooms for which he has no further use, men of letters and others who find in the repose of the Temple and its proximity to their work sufficient consolation for high rents and very limited comforts, are to be found in considerable numbers. John Lamb, father of Charles, and a scrivener by profession, was chiefly engaged as attendant upon an old bencher, Samuel Salt by name, who rented one set of chambers for the Lamb family and kept a set adjacent for himself. He is the "S." of Lamb's essay on the "Old Benchers." For some years a member of Parliament, a Director of the South Sea and East India Companies, Samuel Salt had married while a young man and lost his wife early. The shock was one from which he never recovered; it affected all his remaining years. Lamb tells us he was absent-minded to a fault. But he had a kind disposition, was good to John Lamb, and gave Charles and Mary the run of his library when they were children. He it was who helped Charles first to Christ's Hospital and then to the India House. The elder Lamb spent forty years in the service of the good bencher, who on his death in 1792 was found to have left £500 South Sea Stock to his servant and friend,

together with £10 per annum annuity. Mrs. Lamb received £200 by the same will.

Elia's early years were spent in the shadow of the Temple, where he was watched over with tender care by his sister Mary and his aunt Sarah, his father's sister. Of the latter he writes with deep affection in "My Relations," telling of her habits and taste in books. He also recorded her virtues in some verses. Charles Lamb's earliest reading led him to Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," the Bible, and "Joseph Glanvil on Witches"—which last book had a certain effect upon his nerves, and was to be referred to in later years in the essay on "Witches and other Night Fears." It is one of Lamb's peculiarities that in middle age his memory harked back to childhood, and he found all its incidents fresh and vivid, though, as has been suggested, his sister's keen memory may have prompted his own. Perhaps the strange sense of truth and actuality which underlies these essays is due to the clear recollection of bygone times; aided or unaided, he sees the child that was, sees him with infinite affection and concern, and persuades his most intimate thoughts to paper.

As a little boy of four or five, Lamb was taken down to Hertfordshire, to Mackery End, the house of his great-aunt, Mrs. Gladman, and he seems to have remembered something of the visit in later years. But, unless he was prompted and refreshed in his memory by Mary Lamb, he may have confused this with a visit to Blakesware in the same county,

where he was taken a year or two later. Mackery End, a comfortable farmhouse rebuilt since Lamb's day, is near Wheathampstead, while Blakesware House, at Widford, near Ware, belonged to an old lady named Mrs. Plumer, widow of one William Plumer, M.P. Mrs. Plumer's housekeeper, Mrs. Field, *née* Bruton, who served the family for more than half a century, and was for some years in sole charge at Blakesware House, was Charles Lamb's grandmother—she married his mother's father. Of the two children who rambled unrebuked through Blakesware House, Charles seems to have seen nothing of Mrs. Plumer, but Mary did, and has recorded her impressions of that rather eccentric lady. John, the elder brother of Charles and Mary, was also a visitor to this grandmother at Blakesware. Elia refers to his grandmother and the house near Widford in one of the most beautiful of his essays, "Dream Children." Sketches of Blakesware House exist, but the house itself lives only in Lamb's pages; it was pulled down in the early years of the nineteenth century, and the furniture moved to another and neighbouring seat of the family, Gilston Park. Another Blakesware House, in the possession of the Gosselin family, has risen on its site. It is a comparatively modern structure, more imposing than beautiful. Mary Field, the worthy old lady who seems to have transmitted so much simplicity and rectitude to her child and grandchildren, is buried in Widford Church, close by the scene of more than fifty years' honest labour. Visiting Widford a month

or two ago, the writer found her grave, the memorial stone hard worn and the carving on it well-nigh obliterated. But it was possible to decipher the following lines, signed "Charles Lamb":—

> "On the green hill-top,
> Hard by the house of prayer,
> A modest roof, and not
> Distinguished from its neighbouring barn
> Save by a slender-tapering length of spire,
> Grandame sleeps."

The church has been rebuilt since Mary Field was laid to rest. She died in 1792, aged 79. In "Rosamund Gray" Charles Lamb brings some of the Widford and Blakesware folk to the stage. Both villages and Buntingford, near which in days to come, 1812, Lamb was to inherit a cottage and a garden at Cherry Green from the widow of his godfather, Francis Field, are all on the Essex side of Hertfordshire, in the country of the Puckeridge Hunt. To those who are enamoured of the richness of Surrey and Kent, and of the splendid vistas that the more fashionable parts of Hertfordshire afford, this side of the country has few attractions. Round Buntingford there is much sheep-feeding on rather poor grass. Blakesware, Mackery End, and Widford are in a country of stiff loam and clay, or brick earth on clay. Water is not too plentiful; the rent of big farms does not often exceed eighteen shillings per acre, and is sometimes less; the ploughs demand three horses, cottages are few and in poor re-

CROWN OFFICE ROW, AS IT IS TO-DAY, SHOWING A PART OF THE INNER TEMPLE GARDEN

pair, wages of agricultural labourers vary from thirteen to fifteen shillings a week. In the days of Charles Lamb and until the repeal of the Corn Laws, farmers employed twice or thrice the number of men in service to-day, wages were lower, food cost more, and old labourers have told the writer that their fathers added to their slender income by poaching and stealing.

It was no very serious or immoral thieving—a little corn, a few eggs—whatever could be taken without risk of detection, nothing that was not necessary to help them to live. Their food consisted largely of bread, onions, and potatoes, with such green vegetables as they could raise on their garden patch. At long intervals they killed the fatted pig, they raised large families, and the weaker ones succumbed to what would probably be diagnosed to-day as slow starvation. Sometimes the "living in" system was followed, but it led to nameless evils. To-day, the labourer with his thirteen shillings, his allowance for haysel and harvest, his coal and his wood, is in far better state. The influx to the towns has led farmers to be considerate to those who remain behind, and cheap food has spread the labourer's table almost bountifully, if we compare it with the bad old days. Scotsmen, Welshmen, Yorkshiremen, and Cornishmen have descended upon Lamb's corner of Hertfordshire, and by working through every hour of light have made a bare living on the land. In his survey of the county made a few years ago, Mr. Rider Haggard, on the authority of the agent of a big estate, calls

Buntingford a place of "poor heavy lands, the worst in Hertfordshire, where labour was troublesome and crops poor, and rents were little more than ten shillings per acre." Land had fallen in a quarter of a century from £50 per acre to £20 or less. Conditions have improved since then, and prices with them, following the rise in the price of wheat, but Lamb's corner of Hertfordshire has few attractions to compare with the more prosperous parts of the county on either side of the Great North Road, though he has given it a charm for the book-lover which few other parts of a fairly prosperous county can offer. It is matter for regret that his brief acquaintance with Widford and Blakesware did not lead him to inquire closely into rural conditions, but it will be remembered that Lamb was never a countryman at heart; he looked to it merely for fresh air and exercise, and was happiest in and round the confines of the City of London. He says that while he was in the country he loved to walk as far as he could on the London road in the direction of the metropolis. It may be doubted whether his heart left town even when his body sojourned in the country..

## II. SCHOOLDAYS AND EARLY MANHOOD

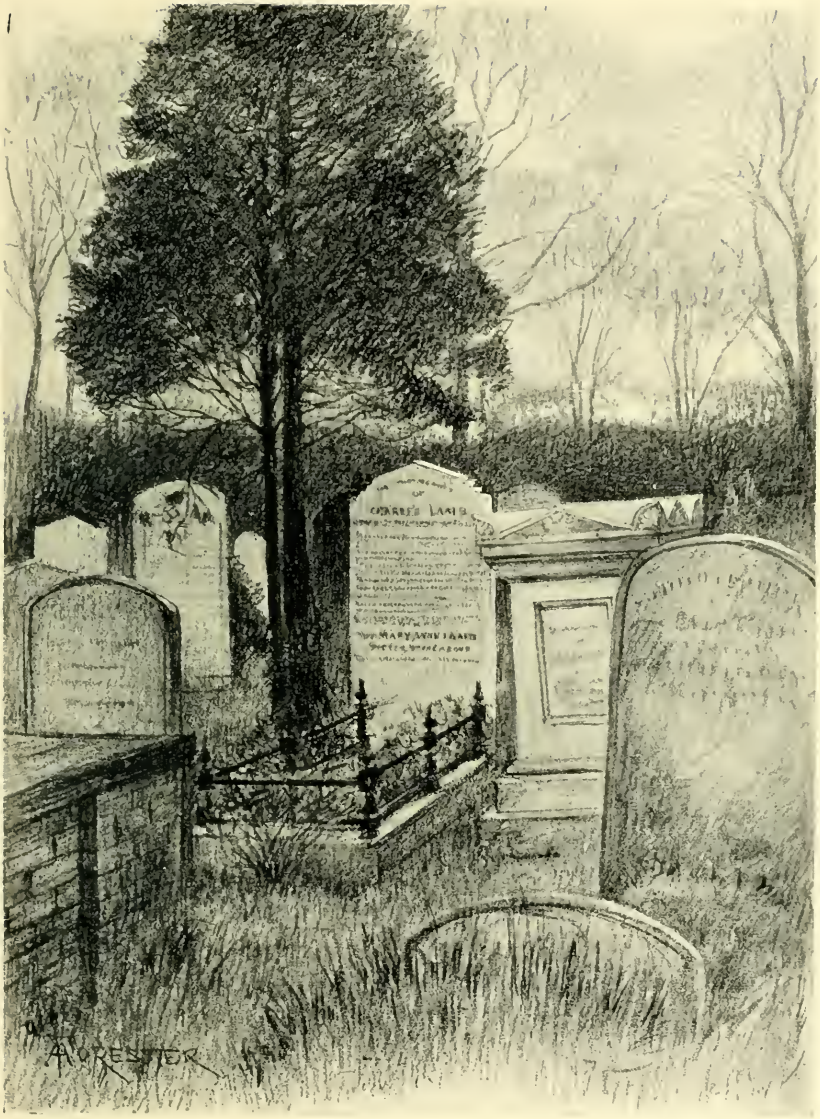
Elia's earliest teacher was one Mrs. Reynolds, a friend of Oliver Goldsmith, who must have endeared herself to her young pupil, for she was ever a welcome visitor to his rooms, and he gave her a pension when

she could work no longer. He suggested that when she died he came into an annuity—so long had he supported her declining years. From her teaching he proceeded to the school of Mr. William Bird, whom he described in time to come as "in the main a humane and judicious master"—no small praise in days when the average schoolmaster was neither. Mary Lamb was educated in the same abode of learning. The school-house was in a passage leading from Fetter Lane to Bartlett's Buildings, and has now passed from view. It looked out upon such a garden as the immediate neighbourhood could provide, sufficiently attractive to make the teaching of the good Mr. William Bird more than ever tiresome. Fetter Lane to-day is given up to newspaper offices; a few small shops and eating-houses cater for residents in the Temple and workers in the print rooms respectively; the thoroughfare is mean, narrow, and dirty, seemingly crowded with heavy drays going nowhere in particular with as much noise as they can make, doubtless a strange contrast to the street that the little Elia knew as he tramped to and from his father's rooms.

Lamb entered Christ's Hospital towards the end of 1782. To-day the school is far out in the Sussex country, a little town in itself, a triumph of administration; but Londoners have not forgotten it as it stood only a few years ago in Newgate Street and the vicinity of the New Bailey. Lamb, aged seven, and Coleridge, aged ten, entered at the same time. Both

have written in detail about the school, so too have Leigh Hunt and A. W. Trollope, so there is no need to dwell upon Lamb's schooldays. The poor diet was supplemented for Elia by his old Aunt Hetty, and he was not ill-treated, partly because he chanced to be under the mild-mannered cleric, Matthew Field, and not for long under the brutal Rev. James Boyer, who was upper master—even Lamb called him "a rabid pedant." Boyer is described by Leigh Hunt as "a short, stout man inclining to punchiness, with large face and hands, an aquiline nose, long upper lip, and a sharp mouth. His eye was close and cruel." Lamb stayed at Christ's Hospital until he was fourteen, and seems to have gone from there to the office of one Joseph Paice, at 27 Bread Street Hill. In September 1791, he entered the Examiner's office in the South Sea House to earn the modest wage of half a guinea per week, but he was not long in this service. He left in February 1792, when Samuel Salt, the friend and patron of the family, died. But the six months had not been wasted—they were to bear fruit in the essays.

On the death of Samuel Salt, the Lamb family left the Temple for No. 7 Little Queen Street, now lost in the improvements that gave Aldwych and Kingsway to London only a few years ago. As soon as the confusion occasioned by the old bencher's death and the consequent moving had subsided, young Lamb entered the East India House, where the rest of his working days, three-and-thirty years in all, were to be



THE GRAVE OF CHARLES AND MARY LAMB IN EDMONTON CHURCHYARD

spent. Joseph Paice, his old employer, and Sir Francis Baring, Chairman of the East India Company, nominated him, and £1000 was required in bonds for his good behaviour. Lamb was fortunate enough to find a guarantor in another of the benchers with whom his elder brother, John, was associated. He was compelled to work for three years before he received any salary. At this period he would seem to have had the usual ambition of lads who are devoted to the stage; he would have been an actor but for the impediment in his speech. He refers to the wish in "Barbara S."

In 1794 Lamb took up the threads of intercourse with Coleridge, his old schoolmate, who was two or three years his senior, and who introduced him to Southey. Lamb was then suffering from his first love malady; he had been smitten by the charms of Anne Simmons of Blakesware or Widford. But for the opposition of old Mrs. Field, this affair might have developed years before, but she knew there was insanity in the Lamb family, and is said to have intervened. The fair damsel made a prosaic ending, for she married, and survived, one Bartram, a pawnbroker in Leicester Square. Within a year or two of the time when Lamb might have been supposed to have overcome his passion, the trouble old Mrs. Field had feared was to fall upon him in terrible form.

Mary Lamb had already developed symptoms of the mental disease that was to take the greater part

of her life from her. Towards the close of 1796, the mania returned for the second time, and in her madness she attacked her parents with a knife. John Lamb, senior, was slightly wounded; his wife was stabbed to the heart. The tragedy is set out in a letter from Charles Lamb to Coleridge, but there is no need to dwell upon it here. Happily poor Mary Lamb, who had been removed to a madhouse, recovered with no morbid recollections of what she had done. She was fated to pass through many another attack, to know that they were coming and that she must seek restraint at once, and in her sane moments her brother's love made life happy. Out of evil came good. Charles Lamb's great sacrifice brought him a certain definite recompense—it made his character. But for the tragedy that drew him to his sister's side and drew his brother John away from them, he might not have grown to be the man he was. The shock and the wakening of the sense of duty moulded him for life. His first published work, "Poems, chiefly Love Sonnets, by Charles Lamb, of the India House," is inscribed "with all a brother's fondness to Mary Anne Lamb, the author's best friend and sister."

Shortly after publication, the Lamb family moved from the scene of the tragedy to Chapel Street, Pentonville, close to the asylum in which Mary Lamb was still confined; but the shadow of death was still upon the family, and a month or two after the removal, Hetty Lamb died and was buried in St. James's,

Clerkenwell. Lamb wrote a threnody, of which the last three lines run—

> "Farewell, good aunt!
> Go thou, and occupy the same grave-bed
> Where the dead mother lies."

Later in the year Mary Lamb was enabled to leave the madhouse, and Lamb visited Coleridge at Nether Stowey, where he seems to have met William and Dorothy Wordsworth. He also visited Southey at Burton, in Hampshire, in company with Charles Lloyd, whose poems, with some of Lamb's, were published with a volume by Coleridge in 1797. It is not surprising that all these associations should have quickened the literary spirit in any man of definite gifts and pronounced individuality. Another force to stir him to his depths was Mary Lamb's relapse; it drew from him the exquisite little poem called "The Old Familiar Faces." In 1798 the *Anti-Jacobin* published a cartoon by Gilray, attacking Coleridge, Southey, Lloyd, and Lamb; the first two figure as donkeys, the last two—their followers—as toad and frog; and in the same year Messrs. Lee & Hurst published his "Rosamund Gray," of which the scene is laid in Widford, near Ware: some of his family and friends appear, slightly disguised, in its pages. "John Woodvil" followed.

John Lamb, the elder, died early in 1799, his last years marked by failing health and querulousness; Mary Lamb came to live with Charles, and they moved to another house in Chapel Street. The tragedy of

those lives was not fated to be continuous; but when we read of the brother and sister walking side by side to the madhouse, carrying the strait-jacket with them, the horror of the conditions that would arise from time to time is made manifest. John Lamb, junior, had left the household—perhaps the situation was too strained for him—and the brother and sister, though within reach of the necessities of life, were in straitened circumstances; for Charles had not been long enough in the service of the East India House to enjoy a moderate salary. In 1800 Mary Lamb was forced to go into retirement again, and her brother's trouble was increased by the knowledge that his neighbours were alive to existing conditions. In a letter to Coleridge he says, "We are in a manner marked." When his sister came out she began to use her pen, and sister and brother moved from their uncongenial environment to Southampton Buildings in Chancery Lane. Once more in the neighbourhood of his earliest home and surroundings, Lamb's spirit rose considerably, though his play, "John Woodvil," submitted to Kemble, had been rejected. But he was not to stay long in the new home. In February 1801 he was at Mitre Court Buildings, in the Inner Temple, since pulled down and rebuilt, with his bed facing the river, "so that I can see the white sails glide by the bottom of the King's Bench Walk as I lie in my bed." This stay was a long one, eight years, and must have been pleasant. The writer of this brief survey of Elia's life lived for some years in Mitre Court Buildings, as near the sky as he could,

CHARLES LAMB'S "WHITE COTTAGE" AT ISLINGTON

but he saw no white sails on the Thames. It is still a pleasant corner of old London when you have learned to be indifferent to the countless clocks that challenge every quarter-hour of the night, and from this snug retreat Lamb sallied forth to add the slender profits of journalism to the meagre salary of East India House.

The *Albion*, a weekly foe of the Government, was his first happy hunting-ground. From this he passed to the *Morning Chronicle* and *Morning Post*. He used to write jokes at sixpence apiece, and tells his readers how, after a few hours' sleep, following a convivial evening, he would rise at five or soon after and would write his jokes. They are poor things, and though they may have kept him actively employed for three or four years, nothing attributed to him has retained its original flavour. In 1802 he writes of the strong desire to go to Paris, a desire gratified in later years, but he compounded with his inclination by taking his sister to Keswick on a visit to Coleridge. They stayed three weeks, not a little impressed by the mountainous hills; but the lakes did not charm him, and he must have felt a little homesickness. The call of London was audible through all the intervening miles. "After all," he writes, "I could not live in Skiddaw. Fleet Street and the Strand are better places to live in for good and all." A year later he took holiday at Cowes, in the Isle of Wight, in company with Captain Burney and his wife, the lady who is thought to have been the original of Sarah Battle, the whist-player, who "loved the rigour of the game." A year later he met William Hazlitt,

who had been endeavouring to establish himself as a painter, but was now about to lay aside the brush for the pen, and was, perhaps, one of the most outstanding figures in Lamb's circle. He said of Hazlitt in later years: "I stood well with him for fifteen years, the proudest of my life. . . . I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the nicest and finest spirits breathing." It is interesting to note that Thomas de Quincey entered the Lamb circle on the heels of Hazlitt. We are indebted to both writers for charming pen portraits of Elia; and Hazlitt, who had a keen appreciation of Lamb's qualities, though his own had little in common with them, supplemented his work with a fine portrait of Lamb in the dress of a Venetian senator.

### III. ELIA'S PROGRESS AS A WRITER

In 1805 Lamb published the book of pictures and verses entitled "The King and Queen of Hearts"; it was the first volume of Godwin's "Copperplate Series," and though the merits of the work are small, any copy of the volume that can be found will command an enormous price to-day. In the same year Mary Lamb was taken ill again. In 1806 Lamb and his sister started the famous "Tales from Shakespeare," written for the publisher of "The King and Queen of Hearts," and at the close of the same year, Lamb's farce, "Mr. H.," was produced at Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, with Elliston in the name part. The author had

built high hopes upon its production, and indulged in visions of affluence, though they did not stretch beyond the figure of £300; but the first production was the last as far as London was concerned. Hazlitt has told us about the *première* in an essay. Lamb's letter to Wordsworth, describing the issue with his habitual courage and good temper, remains to us. His spirit was unbroken; he could jest without bitterness about the failure of his schemes for financial ease, and turn patiently to his duties. It is impossible not to love Lamb the better for his failures, not to realise that his spirit was a lifeboat that could keep afloat in roughest waters. Happily, too, he had other matters to distract his mind. A month after the failure of "Mr. H." the "Tales from Shakespeare" were published, in two volumes, with plates by Mulready. Charles Lamb's name alone was on the title-page; his sister's considerable share does not seem to have been acknowledged publicly for some years, though it must have been recognised by their circle, and was freely admitted by her brother. In 1808, other volumes were published: "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare," a book designed, in the author's terms, "to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors," and very largely founded upon the contents of his "Common-place Book"; "The Adventures of Ulysses," and "Mrs. Leicester's School," the last-named being chiefly from the pen of Mary Lamb, followed closely. Of these works, the first-named is of great importance, a revela-

tion of critical faculty of the highest order. Hitherto Lamb's claim to attention had been more or less a matter of personality—his work had created a mild and sympathetic interest, and no more, among the men of letters who were his associates; but the "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets" brought their compiler and critic at a bound to the level of his friends, henceforward to be, in the fullest sense, one of themselves. It is a book that may be read with great profit to this day by lovers of the Elizabethans, and is Elia's most valuable contribution to literary criticism. The compiling must have been the happy labour of years. In passing, a tribute, however brief, must be paid to "Mrs. Leicester's School," a work of enduring charm and inimitable simplicity, a valuable example of Mary Lamb's fine qualities.

In 1809 the Lambs again broke up their establishment, for no stated reason. After another brief sojourn in Southampton Buildings, they moved to No. 4 Inner Temple Lane. "There," wrote Lamb, "I intend to live and die." He did not realise that he was to be a wanderer all the days of his life. He writes, too, of "the gloomy churchyard court, called Hare Court, with three trees and a pump in it." Like the Mitre Court Buildings Elia knew, the Inner Temple Lane home exists no longer, but Hare Court is still in evidence, hardly more attractive, in spite of some rebuilding and the removal of the pump, than when the letter was written. It has a notable representative of modern literature among its tenants, the dis-

THE COTTAGE OCCUPIED BY CHARLES AND MARY LAMB AT EDMONTON

tinguished novelist, essayist, and playwright, Israel Zangwill. The flagged courtyard may still serve to suggest a graveyard to the sensitive; it is a dark, gloomy place enough on all but sunny summer days. But No. 4 Inner Temple Lane was destined, perhaps, to know more of merriment than gloom, though Mary Lamb appears to have had another attack of her malady on arrival. Rents were low in the Temple in those days. Lamb had seven rooms for thirty pounds a year; for some years the writer paid more than a hundred a year for four, a notable advance in values, and one which is likely to be increased if tenants are still forthcoming, owing to the rise in rates, and, perhaps, to the enormous expenses facing the benchers in Middle Temple Lane, where the clay under the foundations of the houses on the hill would seem to have suffered a serious change. A few buildings have been shored up and refronted, others have been demolished and rebuilt. But many of the old wooden structures in Middle Temple Lane, with their winding staircases and quaint little rooms, have not altered since Lamb's day. Perhaps repairs were going on in Elia's time. Did he grow accustomed to the sounds of work that started at six o'clock or soon after, with a noise calculated to have wakened the Seven Sleepers, continued until further repose was out of the question, and then subsided gradually, leaving scores of honest British workmen contentedly surveying the creation of their hands — each man a Macbeth who had effectually murdered sleep? Did he see the ancestresses of the

charwomen of to-day? Were some of them his contemporaries? did he set the fashion among them of the love of beer that survives to this hour? Memory goes back to a June evening some six or seven years ago, when the writer returned unexpectedly to his rooms in Mitre Court Buildings, called from the country by the imperious summons of a daily paper. Lightly he ran up the winding stairs, quickly placed key in lock, and as quickly entered the sitting-room, to the dismay of his elderly charwoman, who was entertaining friends. Clearly his stores had been rifled for the meal which had been brought to a conclusion; among the débris of the feast were set two cans of beer of quite uncommon size, and five of the sisterhood that chars had assembled to drown, in beer, all thoughts of tea, labour, and clients who were not content with indifferent and often dishonest service. Two lamps, with ill-tended wicks, lighted a scene that had some quality of a witches' Sabbath. Not one of the elderly unbidden guests was in the condition in which those magic words, "British Constitution," may be safely and accurately pronounced. One made haste to seize a beer-can, another took its partner in charge, and speechless, defiant, and angry, they filed out silently, leaving the intruder to open the windows and trim the lamps, and to contemplate the poor remains of a feast at which he had played the part of the skeleton.

Presently his own charwoman returned, spoke huskily about her sister's birthday, and the need for celebrating it somewhere, and complained rather

bitterly of the unexpected return and intrusion. She and her sister are no more; much beer robbed them of the small remains of their repute; let us hope that either "after life's fitful fever they sleep well," or else that in Elysian Fields they wander, rather more rapidly than was their wont on earth, tending the men of law or letters who linger in Paradise, and serving them better than they did here. In the days of their childhood they may have seen "Elia" in and round the building wherein their lives were passed, and this was ever a claim to forbearance.

Turning back to Charles Lamb's literary career, with due apologies for the digression, we note that "Poetry for Children" was published in 1809. Mary Lamb was responsible for the most of the contents of the two volumes, and John Lamb's pen can be traced in one poem. A little later Charles and Mary Lamb visited Hazlitt at Winterslow, in Wiltshire, and spent a month there; it was a successful holiday, and brother and sister returned in the following year. Mary was ill again soon after; her brother records one of his serious attempts to become an abstainer, and wrote for the short-lived *Reflector* of Leigh Hunt. The attempt at temperance would seem to have been short-lived and unsuccessful. Crabb Robinson's Diary records, under date January 17, 1812, that at No. 4 Hare Court, in the rooms of Barron Field, "C. L. soon became tipsy. . . . I left C. L. getting very drunk." He was now working for Leigh Hunt's paper, the *Examiner*, which attacked the Prince of Wales with

such virulence that Hunt was prosecuted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Lamb's contribution to the attack, "The Triumph of the Whale," is well known; oddly enough, it was not resented.

In this year Charles Lamb acquired his freehold property, the cottage and garden at Cherry Green, in Hertfordshire, near Buntingford. He held it for three years, and sold it for £50, but his temporary ownership is recorded on a tablet. The cottage, known as "Button Snap," full of old oak and low-raftered rooms, looked very charming when the writer visited it in April last. The civil tenants say that many visitors come to see the house in the summer; in the winter season it is well-nigh unapproachable. Lamb alludes to his "landed property" in one of his essays. In 1813 Lamb wrote an essay, included later in the "Last Essays of Elia," that was destined to create a sensation, and is still the subject of much delicate discussion. It was called "Confessions of a Drunkard." Some years later, after a writer in the *Quarterly Review* had suggested that the essay was founded upon genuine experience and regrets, Lamb explained in the *London Magazine* that he had read a paper by a *Great Eater*, and had been inspired by it to set down a study of a Great Drinker, "a compound extracted out of his long observations of the effects of drinking upon all the world about him. . . . We deny not that a portion of his own experience may have passed into the picture—but then how heightened, how exaggerated!" And he winds up by promising to write "The Confessions of

WIDFORD CHURCH, NEAR WARE, IN HERTFORDSHIRE

a Water-Drinker." It is very hard to deal impartially with this extraordinary paper and the explanation that followed it. That Lamb had a very convivial spirit, that he sometimes took much more than was good for him, that he had fits of depression at the time when, Lord Byron assures us, hock and soda-water are indicated—these things we know, and they could not but lend a certain strength and vigour to the "Confessions of a Drunkard." But that Elia wrote himself down a drunkard is unthinkable; he did no more than call upon his own vivid experience, emotions, and recollections for a paper that a repentant drunkard might have written. It is not surprising if those who saw him from time to time the worse for drink, took this essay *au pied de la lettre*, and framed their comments accordingly. It may be doubted whether any intemperate man knows himself to be a drunkard; had Lamb so labelled himself, his tenure in the service of the East India House had been brief. In 1814 Lamb wrote a review of Wordsworth's "Exeursion" for the *Quarterly*, and Gifford, the notorious editor of that vindictive print, did not scruple to alter it, until what had been praise became censure. This was the more cruel and unmannerly, for Wordsworth and Lamb were friends, and Lamb was delighted with the work. In later years he attacked "Cobbler Gifford" in Leigh Hunt's paper, the *Examiner*. Towards the close of the year 1814 four more rooms were discovered by Charles and Mary Lamb in their Temple quarters. These rooms were apparently unknown to the authorities,

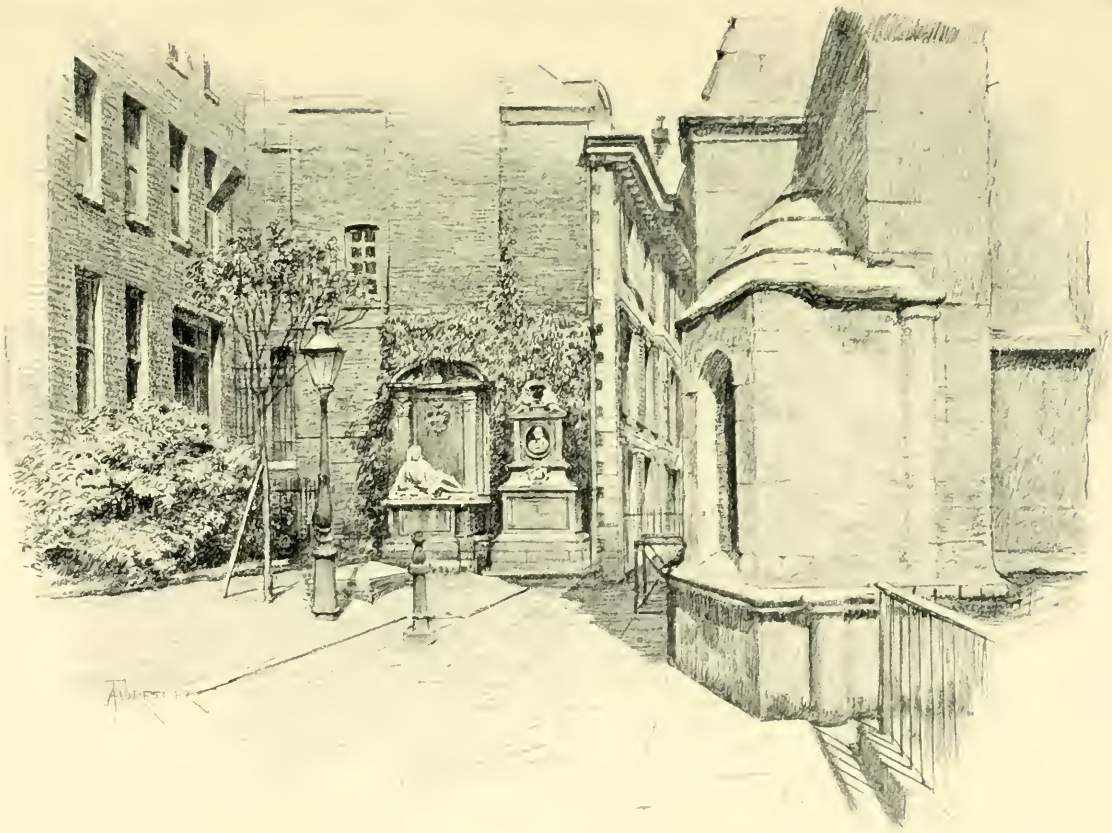
and when the walls were covered with prints, Elia found a fresh workshop. In the summer of 1815, Charles and Mary Lamb journeyed to Mackery End, near Harpenden, in Hertfordshire, in company with Barron Field, and later in the year Charles went to Cambridge. A year later he made a tour embracing Bath, Bristol, Calne, Marlborough, Chippenham, and some other towns in the same neighbourhood, and then went to stay at Dalston, telling Wordsworth in a letter that it is one mile from Shoreditch Church, and that "thence we emanate in various directions to Hackney, Tottenham, Clapton, and such-like romantic country." The fresh air helped him to lay aside his pipe. They stayed ten weeks in Dalston, and there can be no doubt that the then pleasant suburb gave the Lambs all the happier sensations of rural life, the more agreeable because it was within walking distance of town. Time passes uneventfully till 1817, when Hazlitt inscribed his "Characters of Shakespeare's Plays" to Lamb, "as a mark of old friendship and lasting esteem," and the Lambs, for reasons that are not at all clear, left Inner Temple Lane for Great Russell Street, where they took rooms in a house since demolished. They were close to Bow Street and to Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Here Keats joined the circle.

# THE ROMANCE OF LAMB'S LIFE, AND AFTER

In the year 1818, Ollier published Lamb's *Works* in two volumes. The *Works* consisted of "Rosamund Gray," "John Woodvil," some essays from the *Reflector*, some criticisms, poems, and "Mr. H." There is little or nothing in the collection, which was well received, to mark the author's ultimate place in literature, although at the date of publication he had left his fortieth year behind him. In the following year came the great crisis in his life, his proposal and rejection by Miss Fanny Kelly, who was fifteen years his junior, had already made a certain success on the stage, and was playing at the English Opera House. Lamb's duties as dramatic critic to Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*, and his own pronounced taste for playgoing, had taken him to see her on many occasions. The secret was so well kept that we may doubt whether even his intimate acquaintances guessed that aught had transpired to ruffle his habitual serenity. Miss Kelly lived more than sixty years after declining the offer of Elia's hand and heart, and died unmarried, so that her own romance did not prosper. Lamb proposed by letter, she replied in the same fashion, and the first lines told

their story: "An early and deep-rooted attachment has fixed my heart on one from whom no worldly prospect can well induce me to withdraw it." Of the attachment referred to, literary history has found no trace. The story of Lamb's romance remained hidden until he had been dead for many years, and was given to the world by the late John Hollingshead, whose great-aunt, the Miss James who accompanied the Lambs to Paris, was Mary Lamb's nurse.

It is not unreasonable to believe that Miss Kelly's decision, kindly worded though it was, and accompanied by the assurance of sustained friendship, a promise faithfully kept, stirred Lamb to the depths of his nature, and that this disappointment and his quiet resignation bore fruit in the Essays. We have a fairly safe criterion at hand, in a comparison between the *Works* in two volumes, published a year before his hopes were dashed, and the Essays which were to come two years and more afterwards. The great home trouble of Mary's illness was constant, Elia was forced to turn for consolation to thoughts and books, even as he turned for companionship to his friends. Conscious of the growing burden of years, and the disappearance of all hope of the happiness that might have been his in married life, he gave all the strength and sweetness of a noble nature to his Essays. Pen and paper were his confidants. The Essays are the melodious utterances of one who has learned in suffering what he would teach to others, who has seen the richness and splendour of life pass him by, and is brave enough to struggle on



THE TEMPLE CHURCHYARD, WITH OLIVER GOLDSMITH'S GRAVE

alone with no unmanly regrets, drawing no more from his own failures than a generous sympathy with all who fail. Only here and there we hear the full note of an infinite sadness, the scarce disguised expression of unsatisfied longing.

Is it not possible, then, to believe that, had Lamb married and spent the fifteen years which remained to him in perfect happiness, we should have lost the Essays altogether? There might have been a greater stimulus to work, but it would have been rather for the sake of pecuniary reward. Perhaps he would have wished to write only for the stage his wife adorned, and then, with all the conventional limitations of the stage to restrain his fancy and check his range of thought and expression, we might have had more "John Woodvils," other examples of "Mr. H." Even in his retirement, when the work we love best was well-nigh over, he wrote at least two more plays. But surely we should not have "New Year's Eve" and "Dream Children," "Blakesmoor in H—shire," and other papers that will be read when the latest popular editions now in the public hands have become discoloured and faded. He writes in "New Year's Eve" —"Being without wife or family, I have not learned to project myself out of myself; and having no offspring of my own to dally with, I turn back upon memory and adopt my own early idea as my heir and favourite."

For a little while, a very little while, after his rejection by Miss Kelly his pen was dipped in gall.

The attacks upon the Regent, however justified, were little in keeping with Lamb's nature, and it is a pity, for the singularly unpleasant object of his attack, that Lamb was not presented to him. We have it on Lamb's own authority that he could not hate any man when once he had met him. In view of the writer's character, we may reasonably regret the diatribes, for there were plenty of bitter pens and sharp tongues to do work of this sort; Elia was intended for something better.

The summer holiday of 1820 was spent at Cambridge, and here the Lambs met Emma Isola, whom two or three years later they were to adopt. She was daughter of Charles Isola, Esquire, Bedell of the University. About the time of this visit to Cambridge the first of the immortal Essays, "Recollections of the South Sea House," was published in the *London Magazine*. This periodical, of which the title had been used before, had been brought out in January of the same year under the editorship of John Scott, a man of great talent, who was killed in a duel, arising out of a dispute with *Blackwood's Magazine*, when the *London Magazine* was a year old. A few months later the magazine was sold to another firm of publishers, whose chief partner edited it with the assistance of Thomas Hood, and gave a monthly dinner to contributors. In 1821 Lamb's pen was busy in the magazine. Some of his finest works belong to this year, which is also memorable in the annals of the Lamb family by reason of the death of John Lamb, elder brother

of Mary and Charles, a man who does not seem to have been very popular in Elia's circle. More than one complaint of his bad manners is recorded in the diaries and letters of those who visited Charles and Mary. He had gone from his brother and sister when Mary's illness led to the great family tragedy, and had remained in the service of the South Sea House, where he was in a very comfortable position as accountant for many years before his death. He is described at length in the Elia essay, "My Relations," published in the year of his death, and is called "Cousin James Elia." His weakness is finely veiled. "With great love for *you*, J. E. hath but a limited sympathy with what you feel or do. He lives in a world of his own, and makes slender guesses at what passes in your mind. . . . He applies the definition of real evil to bodily sufferings exclusively—and rejecteth all others as imaginary. . . . With all this strangeness of the strangest of the Elias, I would not have him one jot or tittle other than he is." How easy it is to trace Elia's self-rebuke when he found that he had penned something approaching severe criticism of his brother—how prompt he is to make amends!

John Lamb beguiled some of his leisure in writing verses and pamphlets. He was a great advocate of humanitarianism and the staunch supporter of a Bill brought in and passed through the House of Lords by Lord Chancellor Erskine in 1810, for the prosecution of those who were guilty of cruelty to animals. He married late in life, but left all he possessed to Charles,

who was his sole executor. It is quite clear that Charles accepted his brother's attitude towards Mary and himself with no sort of resentment, that he welcomed him to their home, that he honoured him in spite of his eccentricities. John Lamb could not have been indifferent to the sacrifice his young brother had made, to the burden he had borne so courageously, and in leaving all he possessed to him, may have felt he was making some compensation, however tardy, for his earlier shortcomings. We learn from Elia's correspondence that he was genuinely affected by the loss, and that he did not recover from it until some months had passed. John's death left him with but one relation in the world.

In the year 1822 the flow and quality of the Essays was maintained—several charming papers bear this date; and in a letter to Wordsworth, written in the early part of the year, we capture an expression of Lamb's innermost feeling with regard to his work at the East India House, and realise the work of forces long unexpressed. "Thirty years have I served the Philistines, and my neck is not subdued to the yoke. You don't know how wearisome it is to breathe the air of four pent walls without relief, day after day, all the golden hours of the day between ten and four without ease or interposition. . . . O for a few years between the grave and the desk." It is a cry from the heart. Doubtless the confinement was terribly irksome to him, but his life would not be deemed a hard one to-day. Six hours' service, with an interval for the midday meal, and six

MACKERY END FARM, NEAR HARPENDEN, IN HERTFORDSHIRE

hundred a year, with a holiday thrown in—there are many paths between manhood and the grave that are harder far to traverse. Indeed, we find the Lambs taking holiday in June, and leaving for France in company with "a Frenchman" and Miss Sarah James, the great-aunt of John Hollingshead, who came as nurse for Mary Lamb in case she should be taken ill, a precaution amply justified by events. They took boat from Brighton to Dieppe, and in the autumn Lamb wrote to his friend Barron Field—"Paris is a glorious, picturesque old city. London looks mean and new to it, as the town of Washington would seem after London. But they have no St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey."

Mary Lamb's stay was prolonged by one of her seizures, and Charles was forced to leave her with friends and return alone to his work in London. After her recovery Mary spent some time in Paris, and came back to town in the early autumn. Perhaps Elia might have been expected to find more to attract him in Paris. The wish to travel had been with him for many years before the opportunity of gratifying it arose. He was not greatly impressed, no doubt because all his thoughts and affections were centred on London. No city in the world could have shaken his allegiance to the capital; we have seen that the countryside was equally powerless, and that in the heart of the Lake Country his thoughts would wander back to the Strand. He enjoyed himself in Paris—given liberty and old bookshops in the intervals of labour, he was safe to do so anywhere; but students of his work will look

in vain for a record of the journey or aught in praise or blame of the Parisians themselves. There is no other event, save the cross-Channel journey, that is associated with 1822. There was a crowded year for Lamb in 1823, complicated by his departure from Russell Street to Islington, then a pleasant suburb, his short-lived quarrel with Southey, who accused him in the dreaded *Quarterly* of wanting "a sound religious feeling," the publication of "Elia," and a period of illness for both Charles and Mary. To this year belongs the letter in which he warns Bernard Barton, the Quaker verse-maker, not to leave his post in the bank at Woodbridge, in Suffolk, in order to devote himself to literature. There is a singularly fierce attack upon the "Booksellers," whose morals are impugned in a fashion and with a violence we do not associate with Lamb. He says of publishers, "Those fellows hate us," and after a long exordium and much sound common sense, winds up the epistle in fashion that contrasts strongly with his complaint to Wordsworth in the previous year. In the middle of the letter he says—"Keep to your bank, and the bank will keep you. Trust not to the public—you may hang, starve, drown yourself, for anything that worthy Personage cares." In view of the quality of Mr. Barton's verses, there is no occasion to criticise the advice, though the terms in which it is couched are strangely vehement. The summer vacation was spent on the Sussex coast, and Lamb was greatly struck by the beauty of the old church at Hollington, near Hastings. He projected a visit to Bexhill, but

does not seem to have gone there. Bexhill has its revenge. In the beginning of the year the writer was there on a short visit, and, wishing to enjoy an hour or so with the Essays, applied at every library in the town for a copy. There was not one to be found!

Lamb came back to town in poor health, the beginning of nearly a year's slight but growing indisposition, and moved from Russell Street to a cottage in Colebrook Row, Islington . . . "a white house with six good rooms—a spacious garden with vines (I assure you), pears, strawberries, parsnips, leeks, cabbages, to delight the heart of old Alcinous. . . . I feel like a great lord, never having had a house before." The cottage is the earliest residence of Charles Lamb that is still standing, a quiet, unpretentious little place, built up to in these days by long rows of modern houses. To Elia this was a move into the country, and was deeply regretted by his friends, to whom Russell Street, Covent Garden, had been the scene of so much conviviality. Leigh Hunt has expressed these regrets at length. It may be that this change from town to country—Islington was country then—coupled with rather indifferent health, availed to check his pen. The year following the departure from Covent Garden was comparatively unproductive. But it was not altogether barren, for Hazlitt published his "Select British Poets," with a score of poems from the pen of Charles Lamb, together with some extracts from "John Woodvil." The edition, which infringed such copyright as then existed, was soon withdrawn from circulation. In

September Lamb's activity was renewed, and the essay, "Blakesmoor in H——shire," was published in the *London Magazine*. Here we find in its full expression his great gift for getting back to the past and seeing with the clear, mental eyes of middle age the simple moods and fancies of youth. Doubtless his memory had been refreshed and stimulated by visits to Hertfordshire in the summer vacation, perhaps Mary's "rambling chat" had helped. If the year had not produced any further utterances, if a part of his correspondence, grave and gay, had not been preserved, the publication of this one essay would have made 1824 notable in the simple annals of Elia's life.

The year 1825 found Lamb fifty years old and in receipt of a good salary—about fourteen pounds a week—which was now augmented to an appreciable extent by his contributions to the *London Magazine*, from which in two years he had drawn one hundred and seventy pounds. Unfortunately his health was declining, and the burden of office work lay heavily upon him. At the close of the last summer holidays he had written to a friend—"Pity me, that have been a Gentleman these four weeks, and am reduced in one day to the state of a ready writer! . . . The desk enters into my soul." His endurance was well-nigh at an end. Early in February he petitioned the East India Company for liberty, stating that he had served in the accountant's office for three-and-thirty years, presenting medical evidence to the effect that his health was impaired, and asking permission to retire under certain provisions of the

"BUTTON SNAP"—THE COTTAGE AT CHERRY GREEN, LEFT TO CHARLES LAMB BY WILL

Company's charter that would enable him to receive a pension. Then followed an anxious time, for the wheels of government move slowly in the office of big companies, and Lamb was deeply troubled about his future. Thoughts of freedom occupied his mind, while fears of the failure of his petition were ever present. But the authorities of the East India House acted generously in the end, and nothing in their record has given greater pleasure to posterity. On March 29, 1825, a Court of Directors resolved to accept his resignation on the ground of ill-health, and in consideration of his long service and present salary, awarded him a pension of £450 pounds a year, less an annual deduction of nine pounds for the Regular Widows' Fund, to which Lamb was a constant contributor, on his sister's behalf, from 1816 to the date of his death.

So, with nearly ten years of freedom before him, Elia came into his kingdom, fondly believing that nothing but happiness was before him. To realise what the change meant to him, or rather what he hoped and believed it meant to him, we have but to turn to his essay, "The Superannuated Man," from which it is permissible to quote one passage—"Thou dreary pile, fit mansion for a Gresham or a Whittington, of old, stately House of Merchants; with thy labyrinthine passages, and light-excluding, pent-up offices, where candles for one-half the year supplied the place of the sun's light; unhealthy contributor to my weal, stern fosterer to my living, farewell! In thee remain, and not in the obscure collection of some wandering

bookseller, my 'works'! There let them rest, as I do from my labours, piled on thy massy shelves, more MSS. in folio than ever Aquinas left, and full as useful! My mantle I bequeath among ye." He had reached the end of a lifetime's dull and uninspiring labour, henceforward he had but to call at the East India House, in Leadenhall Street, to receive his pension. The prospect had enchanted him, but liberty brought many unforeseen drawbacks in its train.

Lamb had no business temperament, and the records left by his fellow-clerks suggest that his wayward spirit was very restive under restraint, but for all his shortcomings in office, it held him in bonds of unsuspected strength. The temptation to have a joke at anybody's expense was paramount. In the days when Lamb was a clerk in the East India House, the forbears of the writer of this brief review of his life were East India merchants. It fell to Elia's lot to write letters to them from time to time, and he addressed them as "Bensusan & Co.—Sir, and Madam."

Unfortunately the fetters of office life had left their marks upon Elia, nor could an adequate pension and liberty to go his way remove them. He had chafed under restraint, but the long-drawn-out period of repose was no less irksome. His is the story of ten thousand business men who from their office worship Liberty, "insoucieuse fée aux claires sourires d'or," only to find, when they are free to pay full tribute to her charm, that she is difficult and capricious, that her worship tends in time to become monotonous. Work and the

discipline of work were more essential to Elia than he knew. His sensitive mind, which had chafed so much under restraint, was to chafe still more when at large. Perhaps he would have done better to have gone back to the Temple and lived once again in the heart of life. Islington was too remote from his friends' homes; they had their duties and scanty leisure. Mary was ageing fast—she was sixty-one years old when her brother left Leadenhall Street—and her malady was growing worse as years advanced. Now more than ever was Elia to feel the loneliness of life, that perchance Anne Simmons, now Mrs. Bartram, or Miss Kelly might have brightened for him. He had neither the health nor the energy to seek relaxation in foreign travel, nor could he have dared to take Mary with him after the trying experience of the visit to Paris. In short, it must be admitted that the greater part of the hopes founded on liberty was dashed. To all intent, the bulk of Lamb's work was written. Perhaps he was a little distressed by the failure to obtain production of his latest play, written about this time; perhaps his nature, in which there was a certain strain of indolence, found no stimulus to special effort under the latter-day conditions; it may be that Mary's uncertain health weighed more heavily upon him than before, at a time when he himself was no longer robust. In 1825 he could write, "I would not go back to my prison for another seven years longer, for a thousand a year"; and a year later the burden of leisure drew from him the pathetic lines, "We have nothing here to expect, but in a short time

a sickbed and a dismissal. We delight to anticipate death by such shadows as night affords. . . . Our clock appears to have struck. We are superannuated. . . . We willingly call a phantom our fellow, as knowing we shall soon be of their dark companionship."

Now we come to the period of Elia's life in which a genuine love of the country would have been worth almost as much to him as all his literary earnings put together. We know that he took long rambles to Finchley and Turnham Green, to the then rural village of Dulwich, where, close by Alleyn's great foundation, he could enjoy the famous collection of pictures which rewards its few visitors to-day. He was not indifferent to nature, but in the very heart of the countryside he could feel the heart of London beating, could hear the Strand calling with its myriad voices, and would sigh for the busy haunts of men from which his small measure of prosperity had exiled him. Though he felt the loss of activity, a little business worried him. The death of Mrs. John Lamb, his sister-in-law, left him with duties as sole executor that proved onerous, and brought about a slight nervous attack. He left Islington with Mary to join friends in rooms at Enfield, lending the "white cottage" to his friend William Hone, who had attracted universal attention by his political writings and the abortive prosecution by the Government which followed them. Hone then devoted himself to the production of his best-known works, the "Every-Day Book," "Table Book," and "Year Book." Lamb contributed to these. The "Every-Day Book"

was dedicated to him with the very genuine devotion of a profound admirer. At Enfield, Lamb devoted his time to long walks and playwriting, and brought his connection with the ill-managed *London Magazine* to a close. We have ample occasion to regret the death of Scott, the first editor, who had the true editorial gift, and could stimulate the men he gathered round him to do their very best. Another nervous breakdown, more serious this time, came with the autumn, but by the close of the year Lamb had recovered sufficiently to join the staff of the *New Monthly Magazine*, to which, be it added, his contributions were few.

Enfield, when Lamb knew it, was country; to-day London has crept up to and beyond it, and in the busy main streets, clamorous with the noise of commerce, one would look in vain for many signs of the Enfield of more than eighty years ago. In 1826 Lamb sat to Henry Meyer, nephew of the famous Hoppner and sometime President of the Society of British Artists, for the fine portraits now in the India Office and National Portrait Gallery. Never before or after was the head of the great essayist treated with more insight and sympathy. His pen slackened still more in this year, but he kept up a fairly steady correspondence with various friends, some of which has been preserved. If there is a note of complaint in certain letters, it is only fair to remember that Lamb was not writing for posterity; he had no thought that his correspondence would ever see the light of the printed page. He was free to protest in his own quaint and humorous fashion

against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, to grumble at the hard fate which gave him first, health and no leisure, and then leisure with no health. Nor need we assume that every complaint set down in the letters still preserved to us was intended to be taken seriously. At heart he was an optimist; some of the worst anxieties of life were behind him. He took long walks, stick in hand, black clay pipe in mouth, poorly clad in rusty black, a quaint figure forgotten by few. Sometimes he walked alone, sometimes with Emma Isola. The constant exercise in which he indulged, attended by the one animal he ever cared for, a dog named Dash, doubtless availed to strengthen his health; but at home his sister's state was an ever-present anxiety, and all his plans and hopes were bounded by her condition, which was always likely to change for the worse without warning. He grumbles a little from time to time at the limitations of his purse, which compelled him to leave many a desirable tome on its shelf in the second-hand book-shop; but the truth would seem to be that he feared for his own health in the light of Mary's future, and for the first time in his life was saving a part, at least, of his income, that she might be better provided for in case of need.

The year 1827 saw the production of a few beautiful poems, including the lines, "On an Infant Dying as soon as Born," and "In my Album," the former called for by the death of Tom Hood's little girl. These are works that justify his claims, or rather the claims of his admirers, that he should be regarded as a poet as well as

an essayist. Perhaps it was partly in return for the first-named lines that Hood dedicated to Lamb "The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies," published later in the same year.

Lamb was frequently at Widford during that summer; the twenty-mile walk from Islington offered no difficulties; and he was to be found at Enfield too, for the place seemed to attract him. By September the inclination was too strong to be resisted, Colebrook Cottage was abandoned, and brother and sister, with Emma Isola, now learning Latin, moved to Enfield Chase to a house recently built for £1100, and then to be let at the modest rental of £35 per annum. Lamb wrote a characteristic letter to Hood, telling him the news, and saying that he and Mary would come to town from time to time to breathe "the fresher air of the Metropolis." The house at Enfield Chase is still standing; it is quite unattractive. The Lambs were not destined to remain in one place —Elia's spirit was one that could not brook any set of walls for long; but the personality of the Lambs was a magnet that drew their best friends from town, and many social gatherings in the little house in Enfield Chase thrill us to this hour when we turn to recall them. We may be sure that of all the gifted men and women who left London to visit the Lambs none was more welcome than Fanny Kelly, whose friendship was constant to the end. Wordsworth, Hood, perhaps Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, Sheridan Knowles, Moxon, the Novellos, all came to Enfield. It may be

doubted whether the delectable suburb has been so honoured since the days of Lamb's residence.

The excitement of moving was always bad for Mary, and the change to Enfield was associated with another brain storm; in all probability these visitations were the worse for her brother by reason of his own weakening health. At first he had the consolation of Emma Isola's companionship, but early in 1828 her education, in which Charles and Mary Lamb had interested themselves so deeply, was complete, and she left Enfield to accept the post of governess in another part of the country. For all the drawbacks, there were very pleasant hours for Lamb in his new home; many men, and women too, have left us records of their visits and of Lamb's frank hospitality and merry ways. He was still devoted to his clay pipe, and was a generous patron of the public-house, perhaps more generous than the state of his health could properly permit; but there was nothing to illumine the hours of his darkness, and the little lapses from grace, though they are to be deplored, are hardly to be wondered at. His library was an extensive one; he was a devoted and studious reader, to whom the call to meals was sometimes a serious annoyance. His relations with his sister were the happiest in the world, though new acquaintances may well have thought that he was inconsiderate at times. Happily the brother and sister understood each other perfectly.

In this year America discovered Elia, and gave a warm welcome to the Essays, though there is no record

THE OLD EAST INDIA HOUSE

that the discovery brought Lamb anything more than an extended audience and a larger measure of praise. The year 1829 was marked by the prolonged illness of Mary Lamb, who was by now an old woman with small powers of recuperation. When she returned to Enfield, further housekeeping seemed impossible, and the Lambs moved again, this time to rooms next door, in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Westwood, to whose son the brother and sister had shown unfailing kindness. Westwood Cottage, the home of the family, is still standing, and is covered with a beautiful growth of wistaria. In a letter to Wordsworth, Charles Lamb describes his new landlord, formerly "a moderately thriving haberdasher within Bow Bells, retired since then with something under a competence, writes himself parcel-gentleman, hath borne parish offices, sings fine old sea songs at threescore and ten," and so on. He grew less enthusiastic about landlord and landlady as time went on. The Lambs were to spend three years at Westwood Cottage, a very reasonable time for such restless spirits, but one which yielded small literary fruit. Whether Enfield was too far away from "the fresher air of the Metropolis," whether Lamb meant by this whimsical phrase that the mental stimulus of town was greater than that of the country, can only be a matter of conjecture. But we know the call of the town was very persistent, and was revived with every quarter day when he went to the East India House to draw his pension, and came back on the coach, tasting the ale at every stopping-place. "I would live in London

shirtless and bookless," he says to Wordsworth in 1830, and at times he writes of the country in terms of fierce invective. In the slang of our latter day, "it was getting on his nerves."

Why then did he live in it? we may ask. Why, instead of being content with the brief sojourn in town, to be presently recorded, did he not return to it altogether? The answer is not easy to find. Surely it was for Mary's sake; but against this suggestion we have the certain knowledge that when his sister was ill it was sometimes necessary to remove her from his side. There is the possible explanation that he believed country air was better than town air for Mary in the days of her health, that town life was too stimulating for him, and he knew it; when he went to London he would frequently celebrate the visit by drinking more than was good for him.

The year 1830 is to be remembered on account of Emma Isola's dangerous illness and the establishment of Edward Moxon as a publisher in New Bond Street. The connection of events is the more significant because Edward Moxon, Tennyson's publisher, and Emma Isola became man and wife in Lamb's lifetime. Moxon's first volume was the "Album Verses and other Poems" of Lamb, dedicated by the author to his publisher. The work was harshly received by the critics of several leading papers and vehemently defended by Southey and other of Lamb's personal friends, but it did not contain much of Lamb's best poetry, and the verdict is not altogether surprising. It might have been couched

in more gracious terms, but criticism in the thirties of the last century used a bludgeon where to-day we use a darning-needle. What a curious reflection it is upon Lamb's personal charm that his friends could not endure an attack upon his work!

The summer of 1830 was spent in London, but the sojourn was an unhappy one. Not only was Mary Lamb very ill indeed, but Charles had to face the shock of Hazlitt's death, which took place in September. In later years Lamb said of him, "Hazlitt is worth all modern prose-writers put together"—very strong praise, but not perhaps too strong. We do not read William Hazlitt as much as he deserves to be read in these days, though it would be hard to find a man whose writing is more free from aught superfluous, more happy in its complete clearness of thought, more finely turned in its expression. Like so many strong men, Hazlitt was hard to keep as a friend—he was one of the few who had found it possible to quarrel with Lamb; but there is an old saying to the effect that it takes two to make a quarrel, and, in spite of certain differences, Lamb always held Hazlitt in high esteem. The two men were of one age, each gave the world essays and much else of enduring quality. Lamb attended the funeral, and the passing of his old companion rendered him more than ever conscious of the weight of his own years. Shortly after the funeral he made a will leaving his property to Mary, with remainder to Emma Isola.

In 1831 Lamb did some work and received well-remembered visits from Wordsworth and Carlyle at

the Westwoods' house in Enfield Chase. The work was done for his friend Moxon, who had bought the *Englishman's Magazine;* the visits have been recorded by Patmore in the case of Wordsworth, and by Carlyle himself. Nothing in literature is more damning than Carlyle's revelation of his own incapacity when he writes of Lamb—"A more pitiful, ricketty, gasping, staggering, stammering tomfool I do not know. . . . Poor England, where such a despicable abortion is named genius!" By the side of this expression of complete absence of the critical spirit and the power to see beyond externals, John Ruskin's failure to find more in a Whistler nocturne than "a pot of paint flung in the public's face" may take second place. It is doubly unfortunate, because Carlyle, for all his gifts, is one with whom we sometimes find ourselves at variance, and when we would seek to side with him in the controversies which embittered his life, the venomous attack upon a man whose memory we revere comes back with renewed force, with sudden freshness. For all our first intentions, we have to confess that if Carlyle was so obtuse that he could see nothing more in Elia than a pitiful tomfool, his mind must have been hopelessly warped—clearly those who quarrelled with him were not at fault. Oddly enough, while Lamb did not care for the men of Scotland, he had many sincere admirers north of the Tweed. Even Professor Wilson (Christopher North), who had often laid a heavy hand upon Elia in *Blackwood's Magazine,* came to Enfield in 1833, and learned to regard him with some

approach to affection. No part of Great Britain ever sent pilgrim to the Temple, Russell Street, Islington, Enfield, or any other home of Charles Lamb without some agreeable result, until Thomas Carlyle blundered into company he could neither appreciate nor understand.

In 1833 the "Last Essays of Elia" were published by Moxon at the price of nine shillings. The collection had no great sale, and brought little or no profit to the author. Indeed, it may be doubted whether Lamb ever made money out of his books; only the magazines, or some of them, contributed to his exchequer; he spoke of himself as the ruin of publishers.

The visit of Professor Wilson to Enfield and the publication of Elia's last Essays were not the only two events of importance in 1833. Mary was suffering from the then unfashionable malady, influenza, and following upon it came one of the usual mental crises. She was removed to Walden Cottage, still standing near lower Edmonton Station, and then occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Walden, of whom the former had been employed in "Bedlam," as Bethlehem Hospital was generally known. The house was and is a pleasant one; Lamb liked the owners, he saw a good home for Mary in their care, and he was sick to death of the elder Westwoods. They had been a sore burden to him for some time, their exactions had been extortionate, and between them and their paying guests there was nothing in common. Lamb found Enfield Chase too remote; Edmonton was nearer London and cheaper.

Emma Isola did not like the change, and would not live at the house in Edmonton, which she regarded as an asylum rather than a home; but then she was preparing for a greater change still. Edward Moxon had proposed and been accepted, and their union took place at the end of July. The news of the marriage, communicated suddenly to Mary Lamb, restored her reason for a time.

Quite bravely and cheerfully Elia parted with his last intimate friend; perhaps, had Moxon and Miss Isola known how small a spark of life yet remained in the man they loved so well, they might have postponed the marriage. They enjoyed twenty-five years of married life; then Moxon died, and his widow lived for more than thirty years, passing away some nineteen years ago at the ripe age of eighty-two. Elia kept his good spirits, and on a few occasions his pen illumined the pages of the *Athenæum*. Then 1834 dawned, and he celebrated his last New Year's Day.

The closing years of Elia's life have many painful records for those who even in these years regard him as a very dear friend. He did not take care of his health, he drank more than was good for him, he saw his best friends pass from life. Coleridge was the last to go; the sixty-three years of his pilgrimage came to an end in July, and on his death-bed his thoughts were with Charles and Mary Lamb, his last written words held their names. The shock of his death came with terrible force to Lamb, who shortly before his own decease wrote of Coleridge: "I feel how great a part

he was of me. His great and dear spirit haunts me. I cannot think a thought, I cannot make a criticism on men and books, without an ineffectual turning and reference to him. He was the proof and touch-stone of all my cogitations. . . . He was my fifty-years-old friend without a dissension. Never saw I his likeness, nor probably the world can see again." Of Elia himself Coleridge had written: "His genius is talent, and his talent is genius, and his heart is as whole and one as his head."

Happily, perhaps, for Lamb, his time for grief was short; soon he too was to disappear "along the road of kings and emperors." With the waning year he grew more and more feeble, and on the 22nd December he had a bad fall, and was compelled to take to his bed. Five days later he passed peacefully from the lesser to the greater sleep. He was buried in Edmonton Church, where in years to come his sister was to lie by his side. In the church is a medallion of Elia, and below the brief description are three lines taken from different parts of the exquisite poem that came hot from Wordsworth's heart and brain when he heard the news of his old friend's death—

> "At the centre of his being lodged
> A soul by resignation sanctified—
> Oh, he was good, if e'er a good man lived."

How good, how fine a character, how blameless a life, we realise best when, after this lapse of years, it is impossible to write of his death without the sense of personal loss.

One stone marks the grave of Charles and Mary Lamb in Edmonton Churchyard. There are some pleasing lines cut upon it, H. F. Cary being the author—

> " Farewell, dear friend—that smile, that harmless mirth,
> No more shall gladden our domestic hearth ;
> That rising tear, with pain forbid to flow,
> Better than words no more assuage our woe ;
> That hand, outstretched from small but well-earned store,
> Yields succour to the destitute no more.
> Yet art thou not all lost ; through many an age
> With sterling sense and humour shall thy page
> Win many an English bosom, pleased to see
> That old and happier vein revived in thee ;
> This for our earth, and if with friends we share
> Our joys in heaven, we hope to meet thee there."

THE TWO HOUSES OCCUPIED IN TURN BY CHARLES AND MARY LAMB AT ENFIELD CHASE

# LAMB AS HIS CONTEMPORARIES SAW HIM

The story of Lamb's life has been outlined, however incompletely and imperfectly, in the foregoing pages; the story of his work is to be found in countless editions, ranging in price from a few pence for popular reprints to the large figure demanded for *editions de luxe* that may remain for generations with all the qualities of printing and bookbinding unimpaired. His homes and haunts have been set out at sufficient length to indicate the road to his admirers; for Londoners at least, the most remote may be visited with ease on a summer's day. The cyclist may visit Dalston, Islington, Edmonton, and Enfield Chase *en route* for Widford and Cherry Green, near Buntingford, having a peep at Mackery End when he reaches the Hertfordshire country, and, if he be an early riser and skilled in the use of his machine, may pedal back into town in time for dinner. In and around the City of London he can follow Elia's paths on foot, though change has been at work all around, replacing some old buildings by new ones bearing the same address, obliterating others altogether. Elia's chance journeys to Hastings and the Wiltshire country, to the Isle of Wight, other seaside places, and the

Lakes, are of no importance; they left little or no impress upon his life or work. Town may fail to revive vivid recollections of Charles Lamb and his haunts, for London has altered too much in a century for Lamb himself, could he return to us, to recognise some of the paths he trod so often. Dalston and Islington might do more than shock his gentle spirit to-day, but when he travelled farther afield to Edmonton, Enfield, and the broad fields of Hertfordshire, he would find that the hands of Time and Change have passed but lightly over well-remembered scenes.

Now we may turn to his contemporaries to see how he appeared and appealed to them, and it is pleasant to seek in the first place for one or two of the descriptions that are nearest to our time. In the last year of his life, four months before he died, he is described by a visitor to Walden Cottage as "a short, thin man. His dress was black—a capacious coat, knee-breeches, and gaiters, and he wore a white neck-handkerchief. His head was remarkably fine, and his dark and shaggy hair and eye-brows, heated face, and very piercing jet-black eyes gave to his appearance a singularly wild and striking expression." Earlier in the same year we find him described as "a gentleman in black small-clothes and gaiters, short and very slight in his person, his head set on his shoulders with a thoughtful forward bend, his hair just sprinkled with grey, a beautiful, deep-set eye, and a very indescribable mouth. Whether it expressed most humour or feeling, good-nature or a kind of whimsical peevishness, or twenty other things

which passed over it by turns," the visitor cannot in the least be certain. Walter Savage Landor, who only saw Elia once, wrote some lines to record his visit. In these he says—

> "Cordial old man! what youth was in thy years,
> What wisdom in thy levity, what truth
> In every utterance of that purest soul!"

Compare these impressions with Carlyle's reference to the brother and sister as "a very sorry pair of phenomena," and then let us turn for refreshment after this passing unpleasant memory to one of William Hazlitt's appreciations of his friend: "The streets of London are his fairyland, teeming with wonder, with life and interest, to his retrospective glance, as it did to the eager eye of childhood; he has contrived to weave its tritest traditions into a bright and endless romance. There is a primitive simplicity and self-denial about his manners, and a Quakerism about his personal appearance, which is, however, relieved by a fine Titian head, full of dumb eloquence! Mr. Lamb is a general favourite with those who know him. His character is equally singular and amiable. He is endeared to his friends not less by his foibles than his virtues; he ensures their esteem by the one, and does not wound their self-love by the other."

How just, how sane, this seems! Hazlitt does not seek to defend his friend's weakness, but he helps us to understand how well Lamb was loved in spite of it. And Hazlitt, in common with so many others, pays

that constant tribute to Elia's head. We can see its fine quality in the portraits by Hancock, Hazlitt, and Meyer in the National Portrait Gallery, the latter seemingly a replica of the one in the India Office. Even the studies by Maclise and the few caricatures extant cannot hide the nobility of the head, a nobility apparent to all but the Sage of Chelsea. It is somewhat difficult to realise that we are looking at the head of a man who had little care for the country, no recorded love of flowers, no ear for music. If we were asked to sum up our ideal man of thought, we should probably endow him with all these missing qualities, but Lamb's character does not seem to suffer at any point from their loss, probably because he was so transparently honest that he made no pretences in connection with them.

Only once does the spirit of the country possess him—the prospect of being an amateur gardener rouses him to enthusiasm; we find his new interest expressed in a letter written from Colebrook Cottage to Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet: "I am so taken up with pruning and gardening—quite a new sort of occupation for me. I have gathered my Jargonels, but my Windsor pears are backward. The former were of exquisite raciness. I do now sit under my vine and contemplate the growth of vegetable nature. I can now understand in what sense they speak of Father Adam . . . the first day of my happy garden-state." We are left to decide for ourselves whether Lamb was laughing at his garden, his friend, or himself; it is not unlikely that he was

enjoying his jest at the expense of all three. The phraseology is sufficient to show that the writer knows little of gardens or the work they entail; but who can doubt but that Elia, had he been pleased to write of gardening, as he did of gardens, would have excelled? How would the great garden essayists, from Bacon's time to our own, fare beside him? He would have provided fresh avenues for thought and appreciation, some added sense of joy for all time in our garden plots, for it was given to him to adorn all he touched.

This is indeed the special gift and characteristic of his work, to show some unsuspected charm and beauty of the daily round, the common task, to find the glamour of city streets and offices, of surroundings we are apt to deem dull and commonplace. His was the gift of vision that illuminated all it saw, that has taught us to search for and find beauty where, but for Elia, we had not suspected its existence. All the great essayists who followed him have been as enthusiastic in their praise of Elia as was his contemporary, William Hazlitt. Walter Pater is perhaps the one who has done him the fullest justice, for Pater's large mind was capable of understanding every phase of Elia's nature, and the adventures of his soul among the essayists' masterpieces have found fine expression in his "Appreciations." Writing of his self-portraiture, Pater has a very fine passage from which one sentence may be quoted. It is very long, as usual; Pater contrived to put as much into a sentence as would suffice most men for a paragraph: "What he (Charles Lamb) designs to give you

is himself, to acquaint you with his likeness; but he must do this, if at all, indirectly, being always more or less reserved for himself and his friends; friendship counting for so much in his life, that he is jealous of anything that might jar or disturb it, even to the length of a sort of insincerity, to which he assigns its quaint praise, this lover of stage plays significantly welcoming a little touch of the artificiality of play to sweeten the intercourse of actual life." This is very finely thought and happily rendered; indeed, Walter Pater has contrived, in a few of those wonderful and long-drawn sentences in which he delights, to say much about the art and character of Elia that many of his admirers have found impossible to transfer from mind to printed page.

# LAST WORDS

Charles Lamb was an ardent lover of the theatre; his acquaintance with it dated from the time when he was five years old, and before he was out of his teens he was a confirmed playgoer. We know that but for his infirmity in speech he might have tried his fortune upon the boards, and he endeavoured again and again to succeed as a dramatist. We have seen that his farce, "Mr. H.," the one piece which gained production, was a complete failure in England, though it is said to have been received with some favour in America; but as late as the time following his retirement, Lamb's ambitions were urging him to write for the stage. In 1825 he was hoping, in vain, to have a farce produced at the Haymarket Theatre, and in 1827 was at work on another play, "The Wife's Trial," which was as unfortunate as the farce. He approached stageland with sound knowledge and keen sympathy, and has written charmingly of old actors. His admiration for Miss Kelly was first roused by her talents as an actress, for he says in his letter asking her to be his wife, "In many a sweet assumed character I have learned to love you." He had criticised her acting in Leigh Hunt's paper, the *Examiner*, and the terms of his appreciation had moved her deeply. The stage was ever

constant in its appeal to Lamb the Londoner; Lamb the countryman may well have found his exile the more distasteful inasmuch as it kept him so far from the playhouse. His was the genuine love of play-going, assumed by many and felt by few; he carried to the theatre a very wide knowledge of its art, and a sound, well-balanced critical faculty, already expressed in his early work, "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare."

It is not possible to find any detailed account of nights at the play with Elia. Sometimes he went with his sister Mary, often he went alone; the friends who came to his rooms, and have left so many appreciations behind them by which to light posterity, were not his theatre companions. But Talfourd saw him once in the theatre on the occasion of the last appearance of Lamb's favourite actor, Munden. The veteran had sent seats for him and his sister in the corner of the orchestra, and supplemented the gift during the evening with a huge pot of porter.

Among his good qualities Lamb's hospitality ranks high. He loved to entertain his friends, to give them of his simple best. Talfourd, who was so long on intimate terms with the Lambs, tells of his last visit to the house at Edmonton, when Elia was on his death-bed. He could no longer speak clearly, but was understood to refer to a turkey that had been sent to him as a Christmas gift. He was anxious that his friends should be asked to enjoy it. Charles and Mary Lamb kept one evening a week for their friends, in the days

CHARLES LAMB IN DRESS OF VENETIAN SENATOR

Painted by W. Hazlitt, the Essayist and Critic, in 1805

when they lived together in the Temple and Russell Street, and Talfourd tells us that if the Lambs received any presents of game or of the pig so beloved, so highly praised by Elia until his "seasoned palate" turned to hare, it was always kept for guest night. We read that in the latter days friends were ever welcome to Enfield and Edmonton; indeed, they provided Elia with an excuse to betake himself to the nearest alehouse in search of something to give added warmth to their reception.

Probably, if he lived to-day, Elia would be called a "little Englander." His sympathies were ever with minorities. Those who were persecuted became his friends at once. In an age when religious toleration was hardly understood he could not, would not, disguise his own tolerance. He was suspected of free-thinking, he was gravely reproved by Robert Southey for lack of the feelings that every writer was expected to assume even if he did not possess. But so long as a man played his part, he was safe to keep his place in Lamb's esteem, and the abuse of the world at large seemed to give an added zest to his company. Of pretence, of narrow respectability, of all the worst faults of middle-class society, he was intolerant. Mary Lamb was not perhaps equally wide-minded, but the understanding between brother and sister was too deep for differences to rise between them. In the home she accepted all his visitors, and many have left the evidence of a kindly feeling towards her in their books or diaries.

Lamb's love of children is expressed in some of his most striking work, and other evidence of it is given by his contemporaries. Brother and sister possessed the grace in common—they wrote for children together. In the days when Charles had a little leisure they taught children; there is a poem among Mary Lamb's works to Emma Isola on becoming a student of Latin. Elia's affection for childhood took many forms. Either at Enfield Chase or Edmonton, he was asked by a local schoolmaster to take charge of his class on a certain day. He agreed cheerfully, and the schoolmaster left the place to fulfil his appointment elsewhere. Elia informed the assembled class that he was master for the time being, and dismissed it to take holiday. We can see both in the essays and correspondence how his heart turned towards the little ones; we can guess how great would have been his joy if he had been a father. One must search far and wide to find the man who can set down child life in some, at least, of its manifold aspects as clearly as Elia. His recollection of his own childhood, his "Dream Children," his lines "On an Infant Dying as soon as Born" (in memory of Tom Hood's baby girl), all these would be enough to settle his claim as a lover of children, without the delicate work that he did for them with his sister's help in the "Tales from Shakespeare" and the other books that Godwin published.

Those of his circle who were in trouble found in Lamb a friend who would not only do the best he could, but would do it silently and without ostentation.

There are records in plenty to prove his generosity, to show that his scanty store was given freely; doubtless had all his correspondence been preserved, we should find still other traces of the kindness he delighted to hide. His treatment of his old teacher, Mrs. Reynolds, his affection for Emma Isola, are well known, and above everything stands the steadfast devotion of a lifetime to his sister Mary. But apart from these great and leading examples of his self-sacrifice, there are numerous small ones for those who study the leading records of Lamb's life. He could not tire of doing good, and he did his best without thought of any other recompense than came from within. He had been on intimate terms with poverty and distress, he had known more trouble than suffices to break down men cast in the coarser mould, and his sympathy with those who met with misfortunes could never be subdued. The critics of Lamb, who emphasise his devotion to the bottle in the latter days, do not fully consider the conditions of his life when work was over and ambitions had received their last blow, when he was living with his sister, whose health was going from bad to worse, out of reach of his old companions, some of whom had already passed beyond recall. He who had never indulged himself if by denial he could serve a friend, who had given the greater part of the fruits of his labour to others, sought at times to find something akin to the good spirits born of choice companionship in the working days left behind. It is hard to believe that when Charles Lamb took more than was good for him, the Recording Angel did

not look the other way. Where was good counsel to come from? Who was there by his side to encourage, console, or entertain? But there is no need to pursue the matter; Lamb has never needed an apologist—his own generation, and each succeeding one, have been his debtor.

Swinburne's pregnant warning of the folly of trying to write in praise of Lamb comes back with redoubled force now that the folly has been committed, and one looks round in vain for an excuse that will pass muster. The best that can be offered is that we must endeavour to pay our debt, even though the payment be small and the coinage of little worth. As far as the writer is concerned, he has tried to lighten the page with quotations from the wisest and most eloquent of those who have done justice to Elia. Lovers of the Essays will be disposed to be tolerant, for all must have felt the desire to yield their tribute, however small, to one who has given them enchanted hours.

To attract a few more who do not already know him to the circle of Lamb, that is the writer's only aim, and its accomplishment his high reward. Happily the task is easy, for every year finds thousands of the younger generation standing on the verge of the realms of serious reading, with unsullied enthusiasms and all the thoughts and emotions which Elia was born to stimulate. Every new book, though it do no more than tell a thrice-told tale, will tell it for the first time to some of them. There are writers who belong to the past, there are writers who belong to the present,

and only a few who belong, as far as the English-speaking world is concerned, to all time. Lamb is one of these, and his service to literature is not his only claim upon the reader, for he renders a service to life.

It is unfashionable to-day to point to the moral worth of literary work, and we know that the law of art is not necessarily the law of morals. But Lamb's work, while it gives an added zest to life, teaches its students the value of toleration, helps them to see the pilgrimage as a whole, to recognise the interest and the claims for sympathy which are associated with the simple, unassuming lives that are round us on every side and outnumber the rest as the poor outnumber the rich. It shows us how a charming disposition, though environed by every adverse circumstance, can command a measure of love and affection time is powerless to destroy, shows how all men and women, however diverse their temperaments, have some chord which vibrates in response to association with those whose aims are unworldly, whose ideals are fixed, whose purpose is associated with a rigid and inviolable honesty. Above all, we have this crowning satisfaction that where Lamb is concerned, the very best of a great and good man lives in his work, that we may capture it for ourselves, that our own hearts will frame a response to the litany of his unspoken message. Lamb was above all things a lover of life and his fellow-men, not only those who were with him on the difficult path he trod so boldly, but those who had gone before and those who were to come after him.

We learn to look upon Elia and his sister as though they were still in our midst. Rising from their works, we may repeat the last words that Coleridge wrote, "when the bands of the body were breaking and all came in sight," the words pencilled on a poem written nearly forty years before, when the friendship destined to endure for half a century was young and the story of two lives beset by trouble had yet to be unfolded: "Charles and Mary Lamb—dear to my heart—yea, as it were my heart."

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